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SUBJECT: GI CHIEF AL-TIRAWI OFFERS IDEAS ON PASF CONTROL,
PREDICTS CONFLICT WITH HAMAS

REF: 05 JERUSALEM 04825

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (S) In a February 23 meeting with PolChief, General Intelligence (Mukhabarat) Chief Tawfiq al-Tirawi said he favors plans to retain presidential control of the PA Security Forces (PASF) through the creation of an Officers Committee and a restructured National Security Council (NSC). With regard to measures intended to strengthen the security capabilities of the President's office, al-Tirawi said Abu Mazen plans to augment the Presidential Guard with units of Force 17 and create a Mukhabarat "Executive" (i.e., tactical) Force. Tirawai repeatedly expressed concern over Abu Mazen's personal security in Gaza, saying he had warned the President not to travel there for fear of assassination, and pressed for US technical assistance to the PSO and General Intelligence. Efforts to push Abu Mazen to appoint Rashid Abu Shubak as the Internal Security Chief are on hold because of the personal and political opposition of rival security chiefs. Al-Tirawi predicted HAMAS would not push to integrate its military wing into the PASF because such a move would risk the movement's authority over militants and would exacerbate the HAMAS-led government's expected financial difficulties. Al-Tirawi speculated the HAMAS political leadership would not be able to retain control of its militant wing under any likely scenario and suggested that a HAMAS-Fatah confrontation is inevitable.

PASF Control

¶2. (S) Al-Tirawi said the legal basis for Abu Mazen's continued control of the PASF were the 2005 General Intelligence (GI) Law and the 2005 Security Services Law. While the GI Law places the Mukhabarat under direct presidential control, al-Tirawi noted that the Security Services Law mandates the creation of an Officers Committee, incorporating the most senior commanders of each security service and two officials appointed by the President, to oversee all administrative decisions regarding the PASF. (Note: The body has never come into existence. However, al-Tirawi repeatedly referred to his copy of the Security Services Law during the discussion. End note.) The Security Services law gives the Officers Committee control of all decisions regarding promotions, retirements, appointments, and decorations -- essentially, administrative control over

the entire PASF. Since the Basic Law gives the President the power to hire and fire the security chiefs without any requirement for PLC approval, Abu Mazen can retain indirect control of the PASF on the basis of these two laws. Operational control of the PASF and the provision of law and order still fall under the authority of the Interior Minister, a division of authority that al-Tirawi said would insulate Abu Mazen from HAMAS's "likely failure" to provide security while ensuring that the PASF commanders answer to the President.

NSC Composition

14. (C) Al-Tirawi said the PA National Security Council (NSC) would be another important component of Presidential control of the PASF. Al-Tirawi noted that the current size and composition of the NSC made the body ineffective, but that through a Presidential decree Abu Mazen could include or exclude anyone he chooses. (Note: Al-Tirawi has been a vocal critic of the NSC (Reftel) End Note.) Al-Tirawi opined that a reconstituted NSC should include a "smaller number of people" and should include the Mukhabarat Chief, NSF Commander, Interior Security Chief, a National Security Advisor, and -- because of political necessity -- the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister. Alternatively, Abu Mazen could create an NSC consisting entirely of PASF commanders. The name of the body and the composition of the members are not important as long as there is a structure that is empowered for security decisions and accountable to President Abbas, commented al-Tirawi. (Note: When the NSC was re-established in 2005, the security chiefs were not included due to opposition from Interior Minister Nasser Yusif. End note.)

PSO Rashid Abu Shubak Appointment
Faces Opposition

15. (S) In regard to widely reported rumors that Abu Mazen has decided to appoint PSO Chief Rashid Abu Shubak as Chief of Internal Security, al-Tirawi said that the decision was "on hold." (Note: The position is currently vacant because of Interior Minister Yusif's preferences. End note.) Al-Tirawi chose his words regarding Abu Shubak carefully, opening his comments on the issue by saying that Rashid Abu Shubak is a "good person" before adding that his appointment would "create problems" with higher ranking security chiefs due to Abu Shubak's relatively low rank (Brigadier General). Likewise, Abu Shubak faced opposition because of the widespread perception that he was "loyal to someone else," i.e. PLC member-elect Muhammad Dahlan. In a February 23 conversation with Consul General (other topics septel), Third Way Party Leader Salam Fayyad said that Nasser Yusif was responsible for blocking the appointment, which Fayyad described as making Abu Shubak the Interior Ministry's Director General. (Comment: Abu Shubak's appointment as Interior Security Chief would likely face intense opposition from rival security chiefs who are hostile to Abu Shubak and Muhammad Dahlan, not to mention the Hamas leadership. End comment.)

Strengthening the
President's Office

16. (S) Al-Tirawi confirmed Abu Mazen's reluctance to act as commander in chief of all the PASF. Al-Tirawi said Abu Mazen does not want to be held responsible for what is likely to be a worsening security environment. "HAMAS needs to be held responsible for providing public order and preventing attacks," said al-Tirawi. Abu Mazen plans to "task the HAMAS government with providing public order and present the results to the public."

17. (S) Tirawi reported that Abu Mazen has agreed to strengthen the security capacities of the President's Office in specific ways. Al-Tirawi said that Abu Mazen will retain direct control over Presidential Guard (approximately 1600 people), in addition to the Mukhabarat, and plans to dissolve Force 17 (estimated 5000 people), using its forces to augment the Presidential Guard and create a Mukhabarat "Executive Force." By screening officers in these forces on the criteria of loyalty and competency, Abu Mazen would retain direct control of some of the most capable and well-equipped components of the PASF.

18. (C) In regard to the provision of social services, al-Tirawi said the international community needed to study plans to cut off funding for the PA "very carefully" so that the measures "hurt HAMAS and not the Palestinian people." Al-Tirawi urged the international community to find ways to augment the capacity of the President's office fund healthcare and education for the needy, offering ideas that harked of Arafat-style patronage relationships.

Political Wing of HAMAS Will
Not Be Able to Control Militants

18. (S) al-Tirawi said the Mukhabarat has "received indications" that HAMAS does not plan to push to integrate its militants into the PASF, despite high-level public statements to the contrary, because doing so would risk losing control of militants to Fatah-affiliated PASF commanders and increasing payroll expenses at this point would exacerbate the HAMAS-led government's expected financial difficulties. Al-Tirawi said HAMAS's political wing was beginning to face difficulties in constraining its militant wing and suggested that this dynamic will likely grow more pronounced. Al-Tirawi speculated that, if HAMAS moderates its political platform in response to the international pressure, the movement will lose the support of its militant wing. Likewise, if HAMAS fails to moderate its platform, the HAMAS-led government will not be able to gain political support and funding from the international community, the HAMAS-led government will fail and militants will once again become ascendant within the movement. In either political scenario, commented al-Tirawi, the political wing of HAMAS will not be able to retain control of the movement's military wing.

Fatah-HAMAS Confrontation Likely

19. (S) Al-Tirawi said he felt a confrontation between HAMAS and Fatah was the most likely outcome of any political scenario. Specifically, al-Tirawi said a HAMAS failure to pay PASF salaries could rapidly lead to a confrontation with HAMAS. Al-Tirawi added that he felt hostilities were likely to break out first in Gaza and that he had warned Abu Mazen not to go there for his own personal safety. Al-Tirawi repeatedly expressed concern to Abu Mazen about going to Gaza and pressed for US technical assistance to the PSO and GI to ensure the President's security. Al-Tirawi said that Fatah needed to work to bring Fatah affiliated gunmen under control in preparation for confrontation for HAMAS, commenting that "your friends in Gaza" (Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shubak) have not been helpful in mending rifts between the various armed Fatah factions there.

110. (S) Al-Tirawi said he had met with PLC Speaker Aziz Dweik on February 22 and that the HAMAS leadership was "naive" about their ability to change legally mandated security modalities. Al-Tirawi said Abu Mazen could hold up security legislation - or any legislation for that matter -- by sending it back to the PLC with his comments. (Note: Overcoming a Presidential veto or changing the Basic Law requires a two-thirds majority. HAMAS falls short by seven votes, even with the support of PFLP. End note.)

¶11. (S) Al-Tirawi was optimistic that Fatah would prevail in any confrontation with HAMAS and said Fatah should take the initiative in "causing problems" for the HAMAS leadership. Al-Tirawi suggested that the PA could "open battle" with HAMAS by demanding that HAMAS militants hand over suspects wanted in the killing of a Civil Policeman in Gaza City or the HAMAS activists wanted in the killing of Mukhabarat Officer Tariq Abu Rajub, noting that the son of Prime Minister designate Ismail Haniyyah was a suspect in both crimes. Regardless, the PA intelligence services could make trouble for HAMAS in "50 different ways" by publishing information that would embarrass or discredit the movement. Asked if Fatah would prevail if it courted confrontation with HAMAS, al-Tirawi replied in the affirmative but said Fatah would "need someone with balls" for the necessary leadership, a point he reaffirmed several times. Al-Tirawi demurred when pressed to clarify if this was a comment on Abu Mazen's leadership.

WALLES